

Experiential and inter-professional learning: Transforming an assessment task

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The Schools of Physiotherapy and Medicine at Notre Dame Fremantle created an experiential learning task that involved collaboration of students from the two disciplines to develop and reflect on their interpersonal and communication skills.

Prior incarnation of the assessment task was more linear in structure, pairing two physiotherapy students conducting two interviews with an older person (rotating as interviewer and observer). This was followed by an individual assignment evaluating and reflecting on their communication skills. Qualitative results from recently completed Masters Research; “How and why do undergraduate physiotherapy students use reflection in learning and practice?” showed that Pre-Clinical level physiotherapy students were exposed to fewer formal ‘concrete experiences’¹ with guided reflection than Clinical level students. The research, in part, recommended that in order to gain more from learning tasks and prepare students for clinical learning, guided anticipatory reflection and reflection-on-action² using an experiential cycle structure should be implemented.

The Schools of Physiotherapy and Medicine were also keen to develop inter-professional learning experiences from Year 1 that involved the students collaborating over a number of weeks. A new inter-professional experiential task was developed where students from each School were paired and conducted two interviews together with reflective prompts guiding the cyclical structure. Written reflections and assignments associated with this task revealed greater depth and breadth of outcomes when compared to the previous structure. Both cohorts of students indicated learning from their partner from the other discipline; an important step in developing multi-disciplinary teamwork which is supportive of industry standards.

Plans for the future are to continue with new task structure but modify and streamline reflective prompts. To further expose the voice of the older person, it is planned to include interview triggers that may challenge the students’ assumptions, generate tension and encourage development of greater depth of reflection and learning. Ethics approval has also just been granted to more formally explore the impact and outcomes of this educational strategy in a mixed method research study.

1. Kolb DA. Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall; 1984.
2. Schon D. Educating the reflective practitioner. California: Jossey-Bass; 1987.

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